

A. PAPER PRESENTED

AVAILABILITY OF PRIVATE ARCHIVAL MATERIAL RELATING TO INDIA IN OTHER COUNTRIES*

V. D. Divekar

The following note draws attention of the scholars and archivists concerned to the possibility of the existence of considerable amount of useful materials outside India in the form of private archives. It further suggests the need to prepare a descriptive list of such archives for the use of the concerned research scholars.

From the early days of Portuguese contact with India at the end of the fifteenth century till India achieved Independence from European powers some thirty years ago, a large number of European administrators, traders, missionaries, etc., are likely to have taken away with them, on their return to their respective countries, documents which may be useful today for researchers in Indian history.

Also at several places in Europe, (as, for example, at the erstwhile centres of organisations having had commercial, ecclesiastical etc., relations with India, there may be accumulated useful historical material relating to India. On the other hand, some of the Indian trading families, that migrated to countries like Burma, Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia, Ceylon, East African and West Asian countries, are likely to have in their possession old records which may be useful for students of, say, business history. Considerable source material relating to India in the form of private archives may thus be available at places outside India. But no attempt appears to have been made so far to compile a unified list of such private archives outside India and indicate their broad contents.

2. Private Archives in Europe relating to India

From the available 'Guide' books to archival collections in Europe, it appears that, as compared to the private archival material relating to India in other countries, the material available in the United Kingdom is better located and documented. (For a discussion of the 'Private archives in the United Kingdom relating to India and problems in consulting them', see the note by the present author in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Oct.—Dec. 1977, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 561—65).

In the United Kingdom and its dependencies, state papers were traditionally kept in the governmental archives, although carrying them home away at the end of the tenure by the concerned administrator, and keeping them in one's respective family archives was not very uncommon. In

*The previous paper entitled 'Private Archives in the United Kingdom, Relating to India and Problems in consulting them' already circulated has been withdrawn as it was published in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (Vol. XIV, No. 4 October—December, 1977). The author subsequently sent the present paper which is now being circulated.

France, in earlier period, there was no clear line separating state and private papers. Thus, in 1661, it was reported that the French government did not possess its own diplomatic correspondence for preceeding half a century. However, since the middle of the eighteenth century, much of the scattered French official material has been located, recovered and added to the public archival collections. As for Portugal, the private archival collections there are considered to be rich in contents. Although not much is known about the exact contents of the numerous family archives in Portugal, the materials are said to be abundant in size and some of them may be certainly useful for the study of Indian history. Scholars of diplomatic history are reported to have consulted these private archives at times. The principal family archives of Portugal appear to be mostly located in Lisbon, and they belong to the houses of former Dukes, Marquesses, Marchionesses. Counts and other dignitaries, such as the Duke of Palmela, the Duke of Lafoes, the Marchioness of Cadaval, the Marquess of Fronteira, and others. (The present conditions brought about by the recent changes in the system of Portuguese government are, however, not known).

Thus it appears that quite a useful material on India may be found in the private archives of European countries like Portugal, France, Netherlands, and of course, the United Kingdom. The Europeans are known to have a strong sense and love for, and a long tradition of preserving ancestral belongings and records. It may be reminded here that the National Archives of Portugal, the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, at Lisbon, was founded as far back as during the second half of the fourteenth century. This speaks about the long traditions of archival interest in Europe.

3. Private archives outside India—not much used

In spite of the possible existence of relevant private archival material in European countries, little use of it appears to have been made so far. This may be due to: (1) lack of information on the existence and contents of such archives; (2) difficulties in visiting and using them, and (3) difficulties arising out of the language of the archival material—if it is other than English.

If one goes through the relevant research works based on original European sources, one very rarely comes across—except in the case of few studies of British administrators—references to private archival material. This is true in the case of both Indian and foreign scholars. One gets an impression that there may not be really much relevant material in the private archives in Europe, or, else, these scholars of Indian history would have used them. But as the private archives in India are also rarely used by scholars, so may be the case with archives outside India. It may be argued that let the public archives in Europe be used first thoroughly before one talks of consulting the private archives. But that will not be the proper position to take. For the same reasoning may be applicable to the use of private archives within India also. It would therefore be proper on the part of all concerned to be aware of the existence of and to know the contents of different private archives scattered in different countries outside India, and to use them whenever possible and required.